

The Social Pirates The Corsican Sisters

Plot by George Bronson Howard, Novelization by Hugh C. Weir

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MONA HARTLEY and her chum, Mary Burnett, were walking in Central Park. They hadn't gone there to admire the beauties of nature, but because they wanted to talk. And they liked to be in the air; they felt that they could think more clearly.

"Something's simply GOT to turn up soon," said Mona. "We haven't had any luck at all lately, and our money is getting too low for comfort, it seems to me!"

"I know it," said Mary. "You're not a bit more worried than I am, my dear! One thing after another that looked promising, has gone wrong!"

"I think I know why, too," said Mona. "I've become a fatalist since we joined forces, Mary. And we've tried to plan too carefully. Before, when we trusted to luck, everything went splendidly."

"You may be right," said Mary, thoughtfully. "It's certainly true that we did trust to luck! We just took what fortune brought us!"

"We're bound to do things that way, too," said Mona. "You and I believe that we're justified, after the way the world treated us and our friends when we tried to earn an honest living—we've planned our campaign and these unscrupulous men shall pay the cost of it."

"But what I was going to say was that most people wouldn't admit that it was ever right to—well, to mislead people, as we certainly have done sometimes! And if we're going to do that sort of thing, we can't expect to make our plans ahead, the way a couple of girls might do under ordinary circumstances who were going into some perfectly respectable and perfectly stupid business world."

"There's one thing sure," said Mary. "We can't be any worse off! So if we just sit still and wait for something to turn up we can't lose."

"And as you say that—" said Mona. "Look—a bench just big enough for the pair of us—and sheltered from the road by that clump of bushes."

"It looks like an invitation," said Mary. "Let's sit down as you were going to suggest."

But they were not alone long. A curious thing happened. A taxicab stopped near them, and a young man jumped out, calling to the driver to go on, while he himself plunged across the lawn, going through the bushes. Plainly he wanted to escape observation. But he was not quite quick enough, for from another pursuing taxicab, a woman jumped, as it stopped. She had seen him, and now she followed him, calling his name as she ran. "Jimmy!" Oh, Jimmy!

Mona and Mary looked at one another. This was curious—whether there was a chance that it might lead to something interesting for them only time could tell. And time, it proved, did not mean to keep them waiting long. The young man, seeing himself cornered, turned, and met his fair pursuer—she was a remarkably good looking woman, though of an ordinary type—with as good grace as he could muster.

And then she led him straight to a bench that was only removed from the one where Mona and Mary sat by a few bushes—although the occupants of one bench were invisible from the other. Mona and Mary could hear, however, even if they could not see. And what they heard was an impassioned plea from the woman to the man, begging him not to abandon her, saying she could not live without him!

"Edith—what's the use?" he said. "I'm awfully sorry—but if I don't care any more it doesn't seem to me to be silly for me to pretend I did, wouldn't it? There's nothing I can do to you're as rich as I am, I suppose, or I might—"

She cried out furiously at that. But she renewed her pleading—until, at last—

"Oh, you'll pay, Jimmy Harrasford!" she cried. "Some day you'll love a woman, as so many of us have loved you—and she won't care! Then you'll know!"

"So that's his beastly name, is it?" said Mary, in a whisper. She wrote it down at once in a little notebook she carried, and her eyes sparkled as she saw Mona nod. "You never can tell!" she said.

Harrasford was trying hard to get away. But the woman clung to him persistently. She was becoming hysterical, and at last, with a calm and cynical brutality, he called a passing policeman.

"Can't you save me from this annoyance, officer?" he asked.

The woman shrank away then—he had accomplished his purpose at last! Mona and Mary looked at one another.

"YES!" said Mona. "Oh, I'd love to punish him! The brute! Even if there wasn't a chance for us to get anything out of him—and I really believe there is."

"So do I," said Mary. "We'll look him up, at least. He's worth that much trouble."

"Heavens!" said Mary, later, when she found a copy of Who's Who in their apartment. "James Schoolcraft Harrasford! There's a town named for him—and he's worth millions, actual millions! He belongs to all sorts of clubs! Fair game!"

"Tally-ho!" cried Mona. "Our luck has turned!"

They found out a little more about Harrasford before it seemed safe to evolve a plan for collecting any part of their bill against society from him. What they found out was both encouraging and disconcerting. He was susceptible to women, but not as Reynolds and Holbrook had been. He was spoiled, Mona said. Resistance angered him to the point of making him lose interest.

"We must choose something striking—and original," said Mona. "Stale tricks are well enough for some others—but I rather think Mr. James Schoolcraft Harrasford is going to test our mettle pretty thoroughly, Mary! I should hate to think, though, that we were to meet our first defeat at his hands."

"So should I," said Mary briefly. "I've been studying him. I think something savoring of a real romance—something hot and passionate—is what he would like best. I believe he wants to be thrilled. I suspect that most of the women who have given him his ideas have been the placid, easy going type—or else whiners, like that poor creature who was pestering him the first time we saw him."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mona. "What he needs is a woman of real character."

"Yes—and I think a woman of that sort could have held him very easily, any time, if she'd been interested enough in him to take the trouble to do it! Mona—I begin to see a way! Do you remember that beauty doctor you were talking about a few weeks ago? The one who guarantees to change your whole appearance?"

"Yes—but we don't want to do anything like that. We've never done anything that made it necessary for us to be disguised, and we're not going to now, are we?"

"Not the way you mean, no. It isn't disguise I'm thinking of—it's a sort of transformation of our interesting character! You see, I expect to strive to create a certain impression in Mr. Jimmy's mind, and I have an idea your beauty

doctor friend can help. You're a beauty as it is, and I'm not so bad looking—but we need more—oh, pep! Slang does come in handy!"

"I suppose I'm stupid," said Mona, "but I wish you'd explain just what you mean!"

"I will. We're going to fight this campaign out along romantic lines. Well—real romance belongs almost exclusively to Southern races. I think we'll be Corsican sisters!"

"Lovely!" laughed Mona. "Oh, I see now! We're going to work in close harmony this time, I suppose?"

"Yes. This case calls for a complete change of tactics, it seems to me. So—double harness for us. We love one another very dearly, but that love may turn to hate at a moment's notice. It will, too, if we get Mr. Jimmy in line at the start—which I'm depending on you to do. Maybe I work out our plans, but you carry them out—and the best plan in the world wouldn't be any good unless there was some one like you to execute it."

"What's my first move?" asked Mona.



MARY AND HER VICTIM VISIT CHEIRO, THE HIGH PRIEST OF THE NILE.

"I'll tell you after we've had our appearance changed," said Mary. "Telephone for your beauty man to come right along. The sooner that's over the better."

The specialist made no radical changes in either of the girls, but the effects of his work were startling. He looked soother when he had finished, and he had effected a mysterious change even in their eyes, while hair and eyebrows were decidedly darkened. They might have passed, when he had done with them, for members of any of the races of Southern Europe—but for aristocratic members. And under Mary's direction, they made changes in their manner of dressing that corresponded with their altered features.

They hurried as much as they could without risking the artistic success of the impersonation they intended to give, and yet it was only a few days after they had first laid eyes upon Harrasford that Mona was ready to begin. Harrasford, of course, was wholly ignorant of their existence; he had been far too busy and excited in the park even to know that there had been any witnesses to the scene.

No one who had known Mona before her transformation would have been likely to recognize her when, one afternoon, she drove in a taxicab to a spot about half a block from the Empire Club—the one of his city clubs, as she knew, which he usually frequented at this time of day. She had a little while to wait, but at last she saw him come down the steps. She alighted at once, paid her driver, and saw him go off. Then, walking slowly, she advanced toward Harrasford, quite elaborately unconscious of his presence.

It was not so with Harrasford. He stared at her quite frankly; her foreign, piquante beauty attracted him. Yet it was plain from her appearance that he could not hope to win her forgiveness should he speak to her. A lucky accident, it seemed to him—he could not guess how often it had been rehearsed—gave him a chance. She dropped her bag, stooped to recover it, and in rising, brushed against him. How profuse were her apologies! She spoke without an accent, but in a way that proved her a foreigner. He assured her the fault was his; she disputed that, prettily.

In a moment he found himself in step beside her—and unrebuked! He had not dared hope for such luck. But as he looked at her he was sure that she was impressed. He ventured to suggest tea at a nearby hotel. She blushed—but yielded to his urging.

"I cannot imagine why I am so unconventional," she said nervously. "I am a little afraid—Picture it—I, alone here, far from my native Corsica—but just finished with studies at Vassar!"

But when they parted he had her address, and her permission to call.

Here, Mona and Mary alike were certain, was the crisis of the adventure. Would he call? Or would he have a sober second thought that would warn him that he, a well known figure, and enormously wealthy, took a certain risk in calling on a girl he had met in such a fashion, and of whom he knew less than nothing. They need have had no fears, however. Jimmy Harrasford had faults enough, but cowardice was not among them. He took advantage of her permission to call on the day following his first encounter with Mona—and from the moment of his coming there could be no mistaking his purpose to make love to her.

Mona tried to check him, to reproach him gently.

"But why?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I tell you you are beautiful? You are! Why shouldn't I tell you that I have never seen anyone so attractive to me as you?"

For answer Mona picked up the hand he had laid upon her arm.

"That is a so curious remark," she exclaimed. "Just an old signet—beirion in my family," he said. "I wouldn't lose it for a hundred times its value, though. The luck of the Harrasfords is supposed to go with it. I'm just superstitious enough to believe that I'd have a lot of bad luck if it disappeared."

Mona clasped her hands.

"Oh—and so few of you Americans believe such things!" she cried. "In my country we are full of such ideas as that! Signs we have, and many such things!"

But Harrasford was not to be so easily diverted from his purpose. He began once more to make ardent love to Mona, and she sighed.

"Ah, Mr. Harrasford!" she said. "I have kept love from my life so long that I fear you make me afraid—shall I be able to resist you?"

"Why try?" he said, eagerly.

But just then there was an interruption. A key turned in the door, and Mary came in. Like Mona she was transformed; and in her case the transformation was strikingly becoming. Harrasford, when the introduction was over, stared at her in fascinated surprise. He had been almost infatuated with Mona—now Mary, it seemed to him, was even more beautiful and desirable.

"Good—I like 'em both!" he thought.

And Mary, to his delight, proved quick to understand the language of his ardent eyes. They exchanged glances that were full of meaning.

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new one once in a while! Business! I don't believe he ever did a stroke of business in his whole life!"

And then, in accordance with their prearranged plan, she went, in a taxi-cab, to the house where Mary had taken rooms. She arrived just in time to hear the end of Mary's conversation with Harrasford, over her telephone.

"He's coming!" said Mary. "Oh, now we've got him just where we want him, Mona! He was just waiting for me to call him, and he said he'd be right over. You'd better hurry out. I guess I'm the victim this time. I'll encourage him, and you'll egg him on by your jealousy—that will make him sick of you and fonder of me."

"That'll be all right—if he's sure of you," said Mona. "I think he wants one of us, and that he'd take me if he thought he couldn't get you. He was pretty well worried when I talked to him. You could tell that he didn't want to break with me finally, because he wasn't certain enough where he stood with you."

"Well, everything is working properly so far. The thing for you now is to get out, though, so he won't find you here."

"Right! I'm going."

Harrasford, plainly, had wasted no time in coming, for he arrived so soon after Mona's departure that Mary was afraid, for a moment, that he might have seen her. It was plain, however, that he had not.

"I'm so sorry I missed such a row between you and your sister," he told her.

"Ah—it was not your fault," said Mary, with a long suffering look in her eyes. "I am used to being misjudged."

Did she misjudge you, then? asked Harrasford, with a smile. "I rather hoped, you know, that she was right."

"You are making a jest of it!" began Mary.

But even as she spoke there was a furious knock at her door. She started up in fright.

"Oh, heavens!" she cried. "It must be she—my sister—she has followed you here!"

Harrasford turned a little pale. He wasn't exactly afraid, but this sort of thing made him nervous. He didn't wish the idea that these two Corsicans might fall to fighting about him.

"Quick!" said Mary, as the knocking redoubled in violence. "In this closet! Hide! I won't get out of here!"

Before he knew what had happened she had pushed him into the closet and closed the door. Then she admitted Mona. He could only listen, he couldn't see the smiles the two girls exchanged.

"Is he here?" demanded Mona, furiously.

"He's what?" asked Mary.

"You know who you spoke!" cried Mona. "He would not come to me if it weren't because of you! You are trying to steal him from me! Is that right?"

"I do not understand you," began Mary.

"Then understand this, at least," said Mona. "Jimmy told me you are a Corsican. You know how you would not let it go. I was told to steal your lover! Take him from me and you shall be a Corsican, remember that as my first warning!"

She stormed from the closet and Mary, going to close the door, found her sister waiting.

"Look here, let's go somewhere else," he said. "She might come back."

"You heard," said Mary, trembling a little. "She is very terrified! I must protect you from her."

"Looks as if I'd have to protect you!" he said. "Well, let's go and have some lunch somewhere!"

In the restaurant Mary looked nervously about. She studied their waiter carefully, and at last she handed him a dollar bill, with a note folded inside. The note contained certain instructions, and she was pretty sure that the

dollar would have the effect of making the waiter carry them out. Of this, of course, Harrasford saw nothing. He only knew that Mary grew constantly more nervous.

"I am more and more frightened all the time!" she confessed. "Oh, I am afraid, for both of us, for you as well as for me!"

"Is there any chance that she would make a serious attempt against us?" he asked. "You know this sort of thing may be all very well in Corsica, but it seems pretty far fetched here. We should have been," said Mary. "She'll do anything! Oh, I am afraid—we should consult the future!"

"Easier said than done, you know," said he. "Oh, no!" she said, wide-eyed. "Don't you know? It is quite easy! There is Cheiro, the High Priest of the Nile! He will show us what we should know!"

"Do you believe in that sort of thing?" asked Harrasford, rather scornfully. "Oh well—if you really want to—"

Even the table tapping, the movements of a skull, and the other mystifying and appalling accompaniments of a seance remarkably well done as they were, did not impress Harrasford very much. He was thoroughly skeptical, and he

took no stock in such revelations of the occult. With Mary, however, it was different. And at the sight of the message written on the slate that Cheiro at last showed her, she screamed.

"Look!" she cried. "The warning! I feared!"

"You are in danger," he read, "of losing one you love through the treachery of one of your kin. Make him swear to be faithful!"

"Ah!" she cried. "So you would abandon me and go back to her! Oh—why did I ever trust a man?"

"You're no right to say that," he said, indignantly. "I'm not going to abandon you."

"Then swear!" she cried. "Will you swear an oath to be true to me alone, in the fashion of my own land?"

He nodded, rather helplessly, and she drew a tiny stilette. Before he knew what she meant to do she pricked his ring finger till it bled, stripped off his ring, touched it with his blood, and then, pricking her own finger, slipped the ring over it. Then she flung her arms about his neck, and embraced him.

"Now I feel safe," she said. "Now I know that you are mine till death—that no one can come between us!"

"I say—are you going to keep my ring?" he said.

"Would you not trust me with a paltry ring—when you pretend to love me better than life itself?" she cried, angrily.

And though he was disturbed and annoyed by even this temporary loss of his heirloom, he did not feel able to renew his protest.

"Look here," he said, instead. "Suppose we go away for a while? Perhaps your sister will calm down then, eh? We could slip off to some place, you know, go up to Canada, or some place like that, where it wouldn't be so easy for her to find us."

"That might be well," admitted Mary, "if it weren't for this!"

"Then you'd better come to my place tonight at 10 o'clock," he said. "I'll make all the arrangements, and we can slip away without your sister knowing what we mean to do. I think we both need a rest. I haven't known you so long, but it's been pretty exciting."

"Oh, yes," she said, with a sigh. "In Corsica we would think nothing of so long a journey as an affair of the heart as this! Why, we and has been killed there is not even the danger that you must kill anyone to save your way with you! It is almost stupid, it is strange!"

"I'm glad you think so," he said. "But I can tell you it is quite as exciting as it need be to please me! If it got any more strenuous I think I'd have to go off somewhere and take a rest cure!"

"It is because you Americans are so phlegmatic so stolid," she told him. "You do not love with the whole heart, do you we of Corsica? My poor sister—I find it in my heart to be sorry for her!"

Harrasford, however, stuck to his own opinion that this affair was exciting as long as he ever cared to become entangled with it. He was not even sure, while he prepared for their journey, whether he would be disappointed or relieved if Mary failed to keep her appointment.

If she did not appear at his rooms at 10 o'clock he liked her, but he was afraid she was going to prove to be too exacting.

Still, he was rather relieved when the door bell did ring, almost on the stroke of ten. He knew that he would always have been sorry had this adventure stopped short of completion. He went to the door.

"Ah—here you are, then!" he said.

And then Mona, instead of Mary, stepped into the hall!

"Ah— you are here!" she cried and flung her arms about him. "You are mine, then—mine forever! It was only an evil dream I had!"

Harrasford was greatly mystified. But he felt that he had to make a dash for things, for he was, by this time, a little afraid of Mona. He could see, too, that she was greatly excited that she was indeed almost hysterical.

Even while he tried to soothe Mona the door bell did ring for the second time.

"The other one!" he thought, with a gasp. "Oh!" cried Mona, in terror. "It is he—the man who has been following me! Do not let him in—save me!"

"What do you mean?" cried Harrasford.

"Nothing—only do not open—do not open—if you love me!"

But the ringing was continuous now, and whoever was outside was also pounding on the door.

"I must—hide myself in my bedroom!" said Harrasford.

And while she obeyed, he opened the door. A big, grim looking man, dressed in a dark suit, and armed around to face him, flung back his coat to show a revolve's edge.

"I'm from the Central Office!" he said. "I want the woman you've got hidden here!"

"There's no woman here," said Harrasford. "What right have you to come here?"

"I'll see for myself," said the man. And a minute later he had dragged Mona from her poor hiding place. "I want you!" he said savagely. "For murder—for murder!"

"No!" he cried, shrieking. "I'll confess—wait!"

And then, while Harrasford in horror, and the detective with the utmost satisfaction, listened, Mona told her awful tale.

"I went to my sister," she said. "I begged her to tell me whether she had anything more to do with this man, my lover. She denied. Had she told the truth—I would have fought her fairly for him in the fashion of our country. But—she lied. And then—I saw his ring. It was on her finger. I—killed her. I took the ring. It is here!"

The detective laughed exultantly.

"Good girl! I had you right, and there wasn't any use in stalling! So this is your ring, eh?"

"Well, I guess I need you, too!"

And before Harrasford divined his purpose, his left hand was linked to Mona's with a steel band!

"No one knows you're here here!" he said. "Here, if I write you a check, couldn't you let us go?"

"A check? How could I get it cashed? You'd stop payment in the morning!"

"I'll make it to cash, and my bank is open until midnight!"

"Ten thousand!" said the detective, suddenly. Harrasford wrote the check eagerly. With a laugh, the detective loosened the steel bracelet.

"Keep out of such mixups in the future," he advised. "You might strike a honest officer!"

"It was a hard work," said Mona afterwards, "but I think we'll begin soon that Harrasford has married and settled down."